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DEPT FOR EUR (DICARLO), D (SMITH), P (BAME), EUR/SCE  
(ENGLISH, SAINZ, FOOKS), NSC FOR BRAUN, USNIC FOR WEBER,  
GREGORIAN, OSD FOR FLORY

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: SILAJDZIC OFFICIALLY ELECTED HEAD OF SBIH  
PARTY

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DOUGLAS MCELHANEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Haris Silajdzic officially returned to the Bosnian political scene on Sunday May 21st, when he succeeded Safet Halilovic as the Chairman of the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBIH). Silajdzic was unanimously elected by the delegates in attendance at the second SBIH party congress in Sarajevo. Following the party congress, Silajdzic confirmed that he will run as the SBIH candidate for the Bosniak seat of Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) tripresidency in the October national elections. With Silajdzic's official return, SBIH will likely have a much stronger showing in October and will present a significant challenge to SDA head and current Bosniak Presidency member Sulejman Tihic.  
END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) SBIH held its second party cngress in Sarajevo on Sunday May 21st. Close to 700 delegates attended the session, called specilly to facilitate Silajdzic's election. Not surprisingly, delegates unanimously voted for Silajdzic to succeed Safet Halilovic as SBIH's new chairma (a position from which Silajdzic resigned in 2001). Silajdzic ran unopposed. Although Silajdzic has not been involved in Bosnian politics in an official capacity for a few years now, he has exercised a great deal of influence over SBIH in recent months, particularly in the party's rejection of the constitutional reform package in the BiH House of Representatives.

13. (SBU) In public statements, Silajdzic claimed that party members "asked him to return" to fight against the concept of a divided Bosnia and Herzegovina. He denied that SBIH is an obstacle to constitutional reform, saying instead that the party will launch radical reforms that will bring Bosnia's institutions in line with Europe. Silajdzic hopes to present himself to the public as a moderate fighting for a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina, but he is unquestionably positioning himself as the candidate who will fight for the interests of the Bosniaks -- his core constituency.

14. (C) COMMENT. Silajdzic's return to official politics is a calculated move to raise his own and SBIH's profile in the run-up to national elections. Without what many voters see as Silajdzic's charismatic leadership, the party probably would not garner enough support to be an effective player on the national scene. Silajdzic's return means that SBIH will be a much more significant electoral force, especially in the race against Sulejman Tihic's increasingly divided Party for Democratic Action (SDA).

15. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. While Silajdzic uses pro-reform statements to appeal to the voters who want to see BiH join Europe, he relies on an overall Bosniak nationalist subtext to ensure support. After years of standing in the wings, directing SBiH parliamentarians and ministers from the sidelines, Silajdzic has returned to deliver the party's message himself. His real goal -- election to the BiH presidency -- made his opposition to constitutional reform inevitable; the changes to the method of electing the presidency would have doomed his chances. We can expect him to continue running a campaign directed at Bosniak voters -- and against the backers of constitutional reform, including the international community, and more specifically the U.S.

END COMMENT  
MCELHANEY